FBI Admits Monitoring Mich. Lawyer

By Ronald Kessler
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Forty conversations of a Detroit lawyer, who is not alleged to have violated any laws, were monitored by the FBI when he talked with targets of FBI electronic surveillances, the bureau has admitted in court papers filed in Detroit.

In addition, the FBI has admitted making reports on 29 of the lawyer's speeches and having 145 conversations with persons outside the bureau concerning the lawyer's activities.

The admissions were made after the lawyer, Abdeen M. Jabara, charged the FBI in a civil suit with violating his constitutional rights of free speech and assembly by investigating him without having any reason to believe he had engaged in criminal conduct.
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In a telephone interview, Jabara, a native of Michigan, attributed the FBI's surveillances to the fact that he represents a group of Arab students in the United States and a group of university graduates of Arab extraction. In addition, he said, he has publicly advocated converting Israel into an independent state for Moslems, Christians and Jews. FBI spokesman James Murphy declined to comment on the grounds the matter is in litigation.

The FBI said in the court papers that its investigation of Jabara was lawful and that the information gathered did not relate exclusively to activities protected by the First Amendment.

Any electronic surveillances, the bureau said, were authorized by various attorneys general to obtain foreign intelligence.

Since 1972, the FBI said, 40 of Jabara's conversations had been monitored when he spoke with persons who were the targets of 13 different FBI electronic surveillances. No bugs or wiretaps were placed on Jabara's telephone lines or in his home or office, the FBI said.

Asked if the outside conversations it had about Jabara were part of an ongoing probe of criminal activity, the FBI said no. After it made this statement, the FBI continued its surveillances of Jabara, the papers filed in U.S. District Court indicate.

Jabara said he learned of the surveillances by chance in 1972. He filed suit in the same year and was later joined in the litigation by the American Civil Liberties Union.

John H. F. Shattuck, national staff counsel of the ACLU, is scheduled to testify about the FBI statements Thursday before the House Judiciary's subcommittee on administration of justice, headed by Rep. Robert W. Kastenmeier (D-Wis.).

In his suit, Jabara charges the FBI surveillance was part of an FBI counterintelligence program, known as Cointelpro, and that it is currently part of an intergovernmental program called Operation Boulder. The latter program is aimed at reducing the effectiveness of Arab-American political activists, the suit alleges.

Jabara said he learned of the FBI's interest in him after he was informed anonymously that a local bank had asked one of its branches if it had any of his accounts.

Jabara sued the bank, which then disclosed that its request had been prompted by an FBI inquiry. Jabara then sued the FBI.

In response to the suit, the FBI said it had asked five banks if it had Jabara's accounts. In one case, the FBI said, it had obtained details of a $1,000 deposit made by Jabara with funds from one of the Arab groups he represents.

Jabara charged in his suit that the FBI communicated with his friends and associates to obtain information about him and to discourage them from associating with him by creating the impression he was engaged in criminal activity.

In making its statements, the FBI did not disclose the locations of its electronic surveillances but did list the times and dates when Jabara was overheard on them.

The FBI said its coverage of Jabara's speeches occurred because the bureau was interested in the organization that invited him or in what other speakers said.

In almost every case, the FBI statements show, the bureau summarized the views Jabara expressed at the meetings.

In a typical summary, the FBI said Jabara had given a report on the Vietnam Referendum Committee. Another summary said Jabara had espoused the cause of the Palestinians in the Mideast. A third event was described as a poetry reading by observers of Free Palestine Week.

The only Arab action advocated by Jabara, according to the summaries, was filing of a class action suit against the FBI and adoption of a resolution expressing support for Arab combatants and dismantlement of the Zionist movement.

Jabara recently contended some of the summaries were inaccurate.